



Understanding Military Experience of Veterans

Interviewing veterans can sometimes be a daunting task for hiring managers within Kentucky State Government. This is especially true if the veteran has not clearly articulated his or her military experience in terminology understandable to managers often unfamiliar with Military Occupational Specialties (MOS).

Numerous surveys of human resource managers reveal this issue to be the principle challenge when considering veterans for employment. The failure of veterans to unambiguously convey their experience leads to misunderstanding on the part employers regarding the actual experience/skills sets they possess. Unfortunately, this communication gap can lead to a qualified veteran not attaining employment and an agency forfeiting a capable employee.

Despite concerted efforts by the Department of Defense to prepare service members for entry into the civilian workforce through programs such as the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), many veterans struggle with presenting their skills and experience obtained during their enlistments. There are also numerous on-line resources designed specifically for veterans that offer direction in how to properly document their military experience on an application or resume.

To assist veterans seeking employment with Kentucky State Government, the Personnel Cabinet Veterans Advisor provides each veteran who creates a Career Opportunities System (COS) account with information on how to document military experience on the application. These resources are designed to ensure the veteran receives the maximum benefit of his or her military service when applying to job vacancies. Those who choose to take advantage of this guidance can improve their chances of success during the application process.

Given the military environment is team centered, some veterans' unintentionally minimize their individual achievements or successes. This can be counterproductive when entering the civilian employment market in either the private or public sectors. However, as with many nonveteran job candidates, there are those who do not heed the guidance offered and submit vague, substandard profiles that hinder their job seeking efforts.

Recommendations for Hiring Veterans

Contrary to public perception, only a relatively small number of veterans served in a combat MOS such as infantryman, tank crewman, artillery crewman or other closely related fields. Whereas these individuals develop strong leadership, team member and decision-making skills while often operating in highly stressful life and death environments, their "job duties" do not often directly correlate with civilian occupations. Nonetheless, these candidates can offer much to a prospective employer if correctly matched to a job.

With this fact in mind, this indicates the vast majority of veterans served in jobs that are directly or closely related to many civilian (i.e. state government) occupational fields. Therefore, these experiences and skills are likely to be more recognizable and familiar to hiring managers. Though the environments in which the duties were performed and job terminology different, these candidates likely have experience that would permit easy transition into state agencies.

The question is, "What if a veteran's application does not fully indicate he or she has the experience you are seeking but there is enough information provided *to not* seriously consider this person for employment? Frankly, there are circumstances, when it may require a little extra effort on behalf of the hiring agency to "dig a little deeper" when reviewing a veterans' experience. Below are primary suggestions for assisting hiring managers to determine a veteran's suitability for a job:

- If hiring managers lack a basic knowledge of the military's values, organization and occupational fields, consider seeking out veterans within the agency to serve as interview panelists or provide additional insight regarding a candidate's military experience. Though the Personnel Cabinet is responsible for determining if an applicant meets minimum requirement for a job, this informal assistance from a veteran may prevent agencies from overlooking a talented individual.
- Skills translators such as O'NET's Military-Civilian Crosswalk (<http://www.onetonline.org/crosswalk/MOC/>), Military.com's translator <http://www.military.com/veteran-jobs/skills-translator/>, or Career One Stop <http://www.careerinfonet.org/moc/>, are tools veterans can utilize to translate their military experience into civilian terms. Hiring managers could employ these translators to help them clarify a veteran's experience if they wish to learn more about his or her military occupational specialty prior to an interview. However, for these tools to be effective, the candidate must have provided enough information on the application, such as title of the MOS he or she held.
- The U.S. Department of Labor's Career One Stop Business Center (<http://www.careeronestop.org/businesscenter/Civilian-to-Military/civilian-to-military-translator.aspx>) has a *civilian-to-military* skills translator to guide employers on how to match their jobs with veterans with similar military skills. This could be particularly useful if the job vacancy requirements correspond with a veterans MOS.
- Consider using military terminology or Military Occupational Codes (MOC) in job descriptions familiar to veterans.
- Ensure that job duties and responsibilities are as detailed as possible and clearly defined. By taking this action, this can permit the veteran to better self-evaluate his or her experience compatibility with job requirements.
- During an interview, ask for an explanation of any relevant military training or experience the veteran has documented. This may require some tailoring of normal interview questions to fit the applicant.

Conclusion

Interviewing a veteran is really no different than any other job candidate. The issue that should be addressed is to ensure both the candidate and hiring managers do their part in the employment process.

Veterans are ultimately responsible for providing a clear and comprehensible description of their military and civilian experience to state agencies. Failure to adequately document this information rests solely with the individual. Yet, agency hiring managers who are committed to hiring qualified veterans into their work forces, may need to take more active measures to ensure they are identifying former service members who could become outstanding employees and valuable assets to the Commonwealth.